

# Wisconsin Bear Advisory Committee

## Minutes of the 1 August, 2018 Meeting

### Mead Wildlife Area Visitor Center

### Milladore, WI

Meeting convened at 8:39 a.m.

#### Members Attending

Dave Ruid (USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services)

Ralph Fritch (WWF)

John Huff (DNR)

Dale Beisel (Wisconsin Farm Bureau)

Rich Kirchmeyer (Wisconsin Bowhunters Association)

Greg Kessler (DNR)

Wayne Hall (DNR)

Kirk Konichek (DNR)

Miles Falck (GLIFWC)

Scott Walter (DNR)

Anna Brose (DNR)

Michelle Woodford (DNR)

Jed Hopp (DNR)

Mike Gappa (Wisconsin Bear Hunters Association)

Al Lobner (HRC)

Joseph Koback (SCI)

Nany Frost (DNR)

Brian Dhuey (DNR)

Brad Koele (DNR)

8:45 Agenda repair, review of minutes from 6/11/18 meeting

Correction made regarding discussion about potential Spring bear hunt option

Minutes approved

9:00 Review of issues to be covered in Plan Section

The Committee continued discussion of the issues previously identified, as they are organized in the current Plan outline, to identify information needs or particular approaches to addressing the issue in the Plan.

#### Objective 1: Managing for a healthy bear population

- Issue: Potential effect of baiting on conflicts and bear health
  - The Committee engaged in a discussion regarding the conflicting research into the impacts of baiting, and if/how this information should be used to drive objectives in the Plan.
  - A general resolution regarding the Committee's approach to distilling research into Plan content was achieved: Scott will provide the Committee synopses of the literature pertaining to specific issues in advance of meetings where the issues are to be discussed, to fuel informed and balanced discussions. The Committee recognized the importance of using science to fuel the decision-making process.
  - Scott emphasized that the plan is not about change, it is about evaluation. Change may arise from the evaluation process, but is not in itself a goal.
- Strategy B: Develop a population model capable of predicting bear population trends and response to harvest
  - A question was asked regarding the appropriate scale for population monitoring and management. The resolution was that the scale needs to be large enough

- to provide for meaningful estimates of population parameters to foster appropriate management/harvest decisions.
    - The Committee recommends that the Plan shouldn't advocate for specific population monitoring/management tools, but should outline goals and objectives related to the data needed to make informed management decisions. This approach also better supports an adaptive approach to bear management.
  - Strategy E: Ensure adequate black bear habitat in the state
    - The Committee discussed the need to model or predict black bear habitat suitability in Wisconsin, since MacFarland's PhD work provides that information.
    - The Plan would benefit from a descriptive, rather than prescriptive, treatment of habitat suitability, using coarse measures (general land cover- ag or forest, public ownership) in conjunction with MacFarland's work to describe habitat conditions within each bear management zone. This treatment of "habitat suitability" should be moved to the Technical Section.
- Objective 2: Identify bear population goals for each Black Bear Management Zone and strategies to achieve/maintain these goals
  - The Committee discussed the utility of translocation, and how it may be used to reduce ag damage issues in some areas yet support recreational harvest in others.
  - A brief discussion ensued regarding what are the appropriate metrics to use when establishing population goals? Is population size, number of damage/nuisance complaints, hunter satisfaction, or some combination thereof the appropriate measure?
  - Strategy B: create Bear Management Plan, evaluate BMZs
    - General discussion about how to evaluate the current Bear Management Zones, and what information should drive this discussion.
    - Comment: the Committee should all be made aware of the specific Statute or Code language that addresses zone issues, so we have a clear understanding of how much flexibility we have to alter zones or create subzones.
    - Recommendations regarding addressing nuisance issues in metro areas should be developed for the *Nuisance Bear Guidance for DNR Staff* document, not the Plan. The Plan may still address the issue, but point to the *Guidance* document for specific management strategies.

10:00 Presentation: *Public Awareness and Attitudes Towards Black Bears and Their Management in Wisconsin* (Jordan Petchenik)

- Presentation highlighted the findings of this recently-completed survey; Committee members were also provided a copy of the final project report.

11:00 Presentation: *A Survey of Application Preferences for Black Bear Hunting Opportunities in Wisconsin* (Bob Holsman)

- Presentation highlighted the findings of this recently-completed survey; Committee members were also provided a copy of the final project report.

12:30 Discussion: an approach to achieving committee consensus on issues

- Scott emphasized the need for the Committee to stay on track during the Plan development process, so that the timeline can be met. To support efficient decision-making as specific issues

are discussed, Scott related that the Committee does not have to achieve consensus regarding individual issue outcomes. It is valid to forward multiple alternate recommendations to the WLT, or to recommend that further information or research is needed to fuel adequate evaluation of the topic and future decision-making processes.

12:45 Review draft of Technical Section text and discussion of language, format, depth, content, etc.

- Scott presented the first 2-3 pages of text from the Technical Section of the Plan. General consensus by members that the scope/style/format are appropriate and consistent with the intent to have the document both provide a scientific basis for future management decisions but also increase the transparency of bear management for the public.
- Comment that the reported skull size for the largest bear harvested in Wisconsin is inaccurate; Scott will check on this.
- Rich: skull size on largest bear harvested in Wisconsin may be incorrect. Scott to check on it.
  - The Committee engaged in a discussion about recent research indicating that 40% of the black bear diet is gleaned from deer and bear bait sites in northern Wisconsin. Not all members are familiar with this research; Scott will forward the paper following the meeting.
  - The Committee recognizes the importance of using science to fuel the decision-making process, but also recognizes that much research is contradictory or does not provide conclusive results.
  - As issues are brought forward to the Committee for discussion, Scott will provide synopses of relevant research to fuel informed discussions and allow science to drive decision-making processes related to Plan objectives and strategies.

1:00 Identification of key issues to drive future committee discussions

- The Committee recognized that many of the previously-identified issues are similar, so supported grouping issues into “issue groups” to facilitate more efficient discussion moving forward. These issue groups will be:
  - **Bear Management Zone Structure**
  - **Black Bear Damage Management**
  - **Black Bear Population Management**
  - **Black Bear Harvest Management**
  - **Black Bear Information/Research Needs**
  - **Outreach & Education**
- Comment that the results of the social science surveys are important, and should be used to drive Plan objectives.
- Comment: we need to recognize that the public is far more tolerant and supportive of bears than when the current plan was drafted as we move forward with defining population objectives.

1:30 Issue: Bear Management Zone Structure (see addendum at end of minutes)

- The Committee engaged in a discussion about Bear Management Zones and evaluated 1) the current zone structure, 2) the alternative zone structure recommended by the Committee in 2017, and 3) the alternate zone structure presented by the WBHA leadership in March.
- Comment: The goal with any zone boundary changes should be to be able to adjust tag levels to reduce human-bear conflict and damage
- Comment that the recently-completed social science surveys show that the public support moving zone boundary changes to increase hunter success, but do not support, to the same extent, boundary changes for the purpose of achieving management objectives

- A committee member questioned whether or not BMZ boundaries will continue to follow Game Management Unit (GMU) boundaries, or will they change to follow county boundaries like Deer Management Units (DMUs) do? Answer: Current code states that BMZs will follow GMU boundaries.
- Discussion of how the alternative structure proposed by bear advisory committee in 2017 was generated with the goal to address the distribution of human-bear conflicts and public lands availability.
- The current zone format in Michigan was discussed, where tags are sub-zone specific to their GMUs, which allows a finer level of management, but would limit where hunters can hunt. This approach may also reduce the ability to provide accurate monitoring/modeling data to support management decisions, given the smaller size of the units.
- Comment: the Committee has typically tried to keep the northern zones around 6000 square miles in size.
- A comment was made that some WDNR wildlife biologists would like to see the central forest be separated as its own zone from Zone C. This could provide a quality hunting area. Suggestion to keep preference point system for this new Central Forest Zone, and offering “opportunistic” tags for landowners in the rest of Zone C.
- Statement that historically, the northern and southern parts of the state had conflicting objectives in regards to bear population goals and quotas. This may change as part of the planning process, but we need to consider all the ramifications of this.
- The statement was made that hunters don’t change their behavior or hunting location in response to our management decisions. It has therefore been very difficult addressing crop damage issues in the southern portion of Zone D by increasing the quota, as harvest tended to increase in the northern part of the zone rather in the area where the damage was occurring.
- Comment was made that the WBHA zone structure is intended to expand opportunities for hunting with hounds and allow greater management flexibility in the Central Forest and Western portions of current zone C.
- Comment was made that the southern boundary between D, B, and A already closely follows the transition from public forest land in the north to more private, agricultural lands to the south. Recommended not to change this, but does support splitting Zone C into “Central Forest” and “Western” zones. General consensus was not to move the southern boundary of D, A, and B, except in Zone D to address ag damage issues, as depicted in the Committee alternative.
- Comment that farmers don’t want more ag tags, and would rather have hunters manage the bears via recreational hunting. Recommends the Committee alternative, which addresses the goal of creating a new zone around Rusk, Barron, Polk, Washburn, Burnett, and Sawyer counties (or parts thereof).
- Comment and general consensus that the Committee Alternative seems to be meeting all of the issues discussed.
- **Committee achieved consensus that the Committee alternative (see Addendum, below) should be recommended through the Plan development process.**
- Comment: Agreed with Committee’s decision regarding the Committee alternative, but mentioned we’ll need to address the issue of hunters who’ve applied for Zone C, intending to hunt in the area which will be moved from C to D, suddenly needing more preference points than they thought they would to hunt in the exact same area they’d intended to. There are ways to address this through outreach/communication regarding the switch to allow hunters with 2+ preference points to put in for a harvest tag in Zone C prior to the switch.
- Suggestion by Committee member to keep the central forest zone labeled as Zone C, and name the new western and eastern zones as E and F

- Brief discussion regarding allowable hunting methods in the proposed new Central Forest Zone. Beliefs are split whether or not hunting with hounds should be allowed. Concerns mainly center around fear of increased conflict between hunters and private landowners. The Committee will need to decide whether to attempt to prevent conflicts via regulatory means or allow hunters to regulate their own behavior, and will continue this conversation in the future.
- Error identified in the Committee alternative map provided to members: southern portions of DMUs 43 and 44 south of Hwy 64 should be included in the proposed Central Forest Zone, not added to Zone B as indicated on the handout. Scott will make this change to the shapefile.

#### 2:30 Plan drafting/review responsibilities - who will do what?

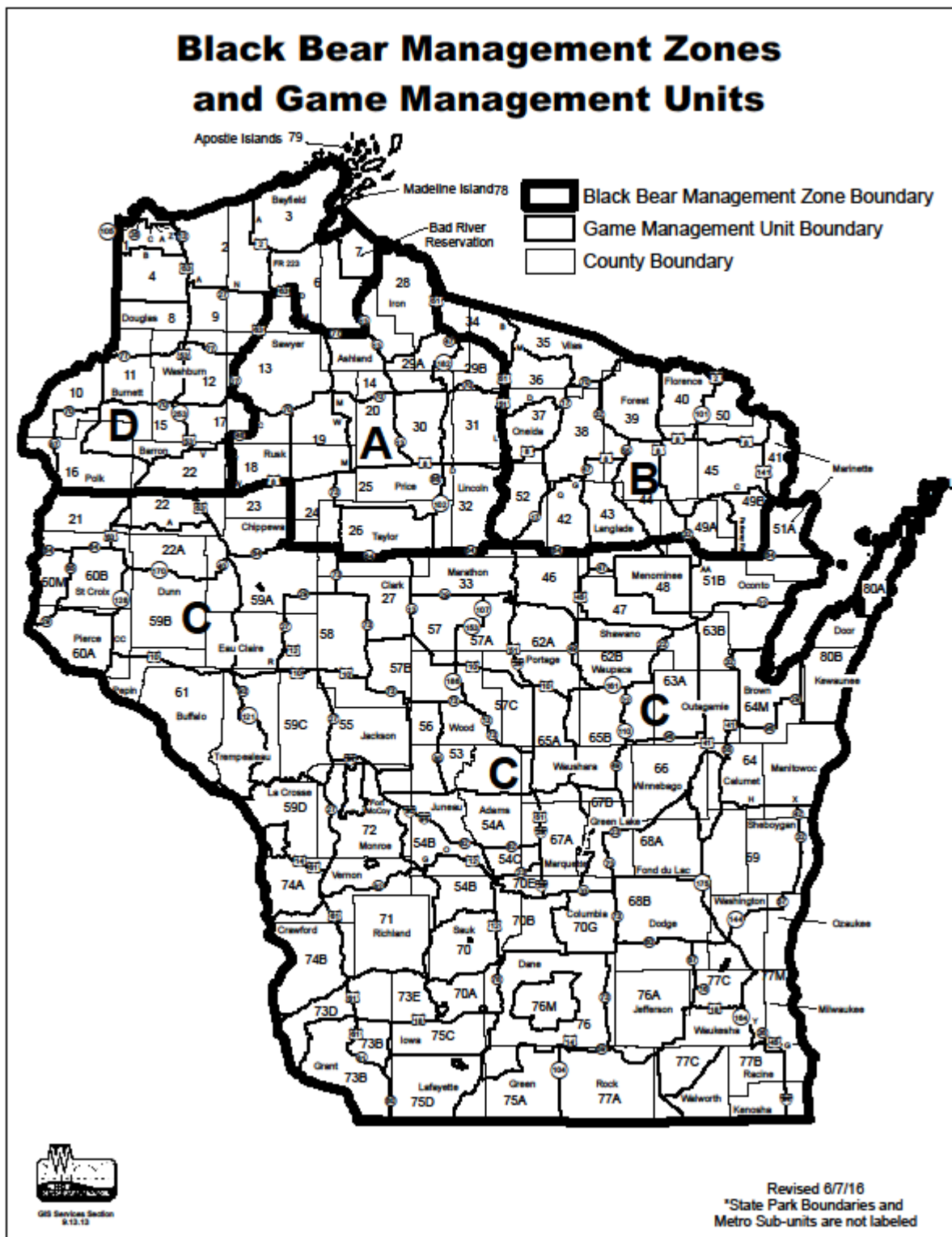
- The Committee spent time discussing writing/editing responsibilities as the Plan develops.
- Brad K. and Dave R. will collaborate on the bear damage and nuisance bear components of the Technical Section.
- WDNR Wildlife Health staff will collaborate on the bear health section
- Brian D. will draft the human dimensions/hunter surveys section
- Recommendation was made to contract final editorial/formatting work on the Plan, once a draft is complete. General support- Scott will look into this as a final draft emerges.
- Scott will continue to draft the Technical Section.
- Scott will send out a Doodle Poll to set next meeting, likely sometime in September

#### 2:45 Public input

- No public attendance

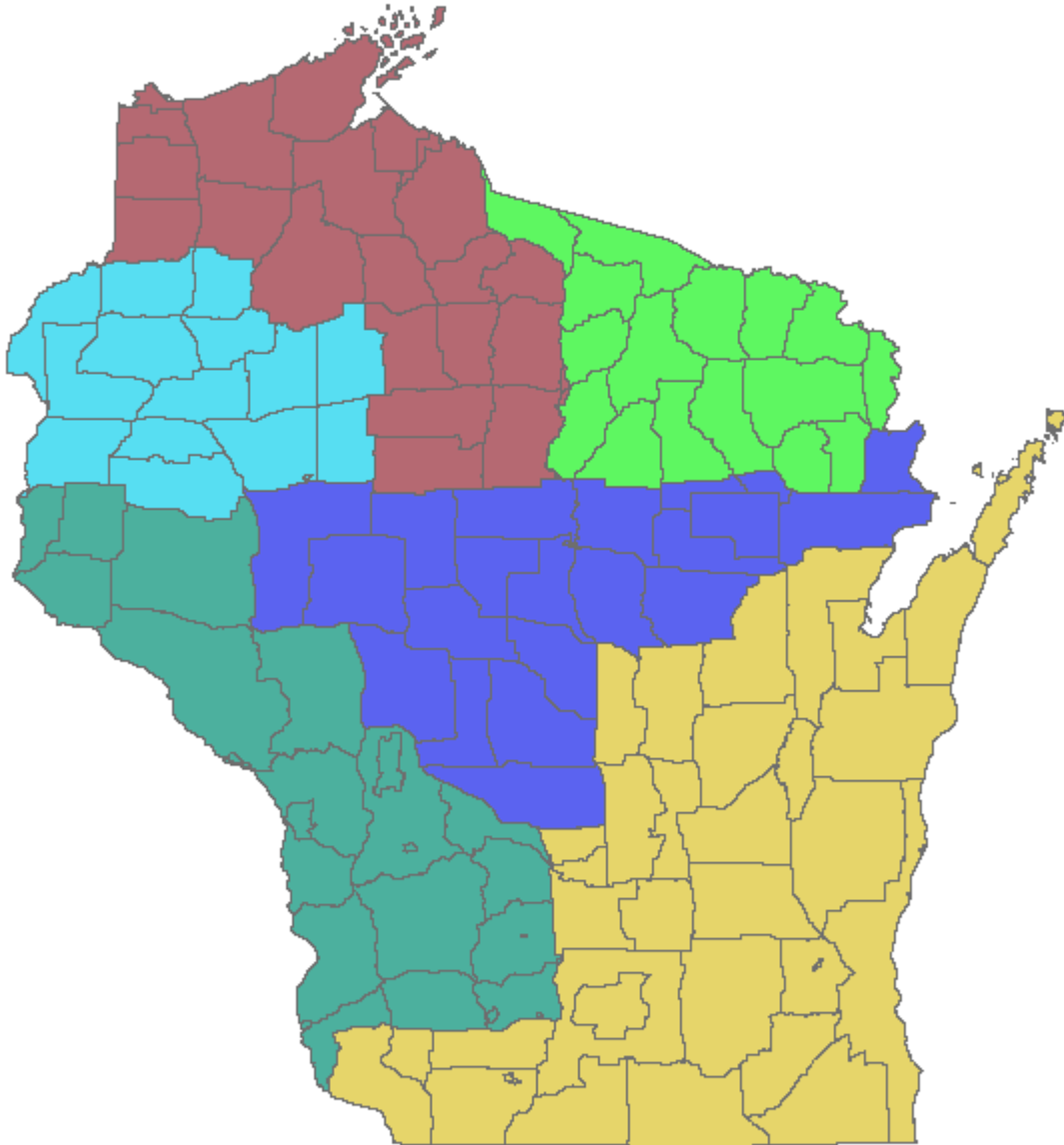
#### 3:00 Adjourn

**Addendum to 8/1/2018 Bear Advisory Committee meeting minutes: Current Black Bear Management Zones and alternatives.**



**Bear Advisory Committee Alternative Developed in July 2017:**

**Draft Modified Bear Zone Configuration 1**



Alternative Zone Map Presented by the WBHA in March 2018:

